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FM AMEMBASSY SARAJEVO

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INFO RUEHZN/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

RUCNOSC/ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY COOPERATION IN EUROPE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 SARAJEVO 001265

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

EUR/SCE FOR CHOH, MFOOKS, ASTINCHCOMB

DRL FOR PHARVEY, SJOHNSON

NSC FOR BBRAUN

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: NEW DEATH THREAT TO RS HELSINKI COMMISSION STAFF,
FAMILY

REF: SARAJEVO 1227

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: The Republika Srpska Helsinki Citizens' Committee (HCC) received a death threat against its president, Branko Todorovic, and members of his family on July 31. Todorovic speculated that the threat is possibly linked to rogue elements (or former members) of RS intelligence and police services. Todorovic will temporarily leave the country with his family, and the HCC will postpone or cancel some public activities in the near term. Todorovic's recent media comments in the wake of the arrest of war crimes suspect Radovan Karadzic, criticizing a lack of progress by RS officials in prosecuting other war crimes suspects, may be a motivating factor in directing threats at him. While the seriousness of the threat is unclear, the threat was widely covered in local media, including interviews with Todorovic about his concerns for police and prosecutors' inactivity. Although these threats are more likely tied to SDS hardliners than to PM Dodik or his followers, it is yet another example of the chilling effect on NGO activity in Republika Srpska (RS), and part of a continuing pattern of threats to civil society in the RS.

END SUMMARY.

CONTEXT

¶2. (SBU) Republika Srpska Helsinki Commission President Branko Todorovic told us on August 1 about a July 31 death threat directed toward him and his family. The threat, Todorovic said, was similar to past threats, mainly directed against Helsinki Citizens' Committee activities. The threat was preceded by a six-month long series of calls by one "psychopath" (per Todorovic) from Bijeljina, who he believes may have been a mentally-ill person manipulated by dismissed former police officers. Todorovic said he views such threats as a serious matter, referencing the murder of a colleague a year and a half ago.

PHONE THREAT

¶3. (SBU) At the time of the threatening phone call, Todorovic himself was in Slovenia. The caller, a male, told HCC office staff that a large sum of money has been offered to kill Todorovic and family. The informant said he personally had refused to carry out the assassination because he knew Todorovic has three children. HCC staff noted the caller used terms believed to be typical for RS intelligence service officers, seemed well-educated, and repeated several times that Todorovic should take the threat seriously and leave Bijeljina and HCC activities generally.

14. (SBU) Todorovic noted the caller referred to Todorovic's public criticisms of people in the RS police and prosecutor's offices. Todorovic told us this likely was a reference to recent interviews he gave to *Oslobodenje* and *Dnevni Avaz*, and a July 11 television interview, in which he reiterated the need to bring Karadzic and Mladic to justice. Todorovic believes these threats are a reaction to these public statements, as well as his criticisms of prosecutors and police for inaction in prosecuting war criminals. In a subsequent interview on August 2 with BHT-1 television, Todorovic complained that the Bijeljina District Court had not processed a single war crimes case since the completion of "so-called judicial reform." He also speculated to us that the threats could be part of larger effort to silence NGOs in RS, and noted the situation faced by Transparency International in the RS as part of this larger effort (see reftel).

REACTION TO THE THREAT

15. (SBU) As a result of the threat, Todorovic's family is planning to leave for a two- to four-week vacation to Germany. Todorovic said that for the near-term, HCC plans to temporarily "downsize" its activities (a regular press conference will be canceled, as well as a planned conference on the justice system in Banja Luka, and HR training activities will be postponed to later in the year). Todorovic reiterated the lack of progress on war crimes investigations by district prosecutor offices in Bijeljina, Doboj, and Eastern Sarajevo. He requested that the USG and other internationals examine closely the lack of indictments in these areas.

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